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CAPITAL SPECIAL

Slaying Probers Win a Friend, Vintage Mailer

By David Braaten
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Norman Mailer has leaped with his usual syntactical gusto to the defense of the embattled House Assassinations Committee, and has enlisted 28 fellow writers to join his plea for continuation of the committee's investigations.

In a letter sent yesterday to the House and to President Carter, Mailer said in effect that while the committee's game is being badly played — and getting bad play — it's the only game in town and the stakes are high.

"The select committee," he wrote, "may be imperfect, impractical and a demon for poor publicity. For all we know, it may be riddled with undercover men. But it is the only investigating body we have in the House of Representatives with the obligation to subpoena recalcitrant witnesses on these matters and the duty to listen to witnesses who have studied the flaws in the Warren Commission report for years.

"By its existence, therefore, the committee represents a threat to anybody who would hope to maintain public apathy about the assassinations."

THOUGH CONCEDING that practical results, such as prosecutions, are unlikely from the committee's work, Mailer stressed the "psychic value" of the investigations.

"A clear idea of the character of the events of the recent past is essential to a democracy," he wrote. "Without knowledge of what happened in an event, how can one debate its meaning?

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"If we do not know whether Jack Kennedy was killed by the demented act of an isolated man, or whether by the concerted acts of a group of conspirators who employed Oswald as the set-up; if we do not know whether the murder of Oswald by Jack Ruby was an attempt to spare the First Lady all the discomfort of appearing at a trial, or an order that came to Jack Ruby out of the chain of communication that ran between the CIA and the Mafia, then we do not know which history we can act upon."

Mailer told a press conference here that he personally does not believe Cuban Premier Fidel Castro had Kennedy shot because Castro would have realized that it eventually would have leaked out and meant the end of Castro's Cuba.

But he noted the belief in some quarters that "the reason the Warren Commission went into the tank" and pinned the assassination on Lee Harvey Oswald alone was the commission's fear that Castro was involved, and that if this were brought out it would lead to war with Cuba and possibly with Russia.

HE WOULD, Mailer said, like to know the truth.

Mailer said he takes it for granted that the assassinations committee staff is loaded with undercover agents. Though he declined to specify exactly what governmental body — or what government, for that matter — the agents are working for, his repeated references to the CIA strongly suggested where his suspicions lie.

His conclusion that the committee is spook-ridden comes, Mailer said, from reading in the newspapers of the committee's strange activities.

"The committee does bizarre things," he said. "It's important to know whether they're doing bizarre things or someone is making them look like they're doing bizarre things."

Asked what useful purpose it would serve to determine that the FBI and/or CIA were involved in the Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations, Mailer said it would at least give the public "firm knowledge" of the agencies' performance.

—Washington Star

NORMAN MAILER
"If we do not know the answer . . ."